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To: DCOZ - ZC Submissions (DCOZ)
Subject: DECAA testimony opposing Case 22-25 June 12, 2023
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Testimony of Nick DelleDonne,
Dupont East Civic Action Association
Zoning Commission

ZCsubmissions@dc.gov

441 4th St., NW – Suite 210

On Case 22-25

Monday, June 12, 2023, 4 pm, virtual

Thank you for this opportunity to address the Zoning Commission and case 22-25. My name is Nick DelleDonne and I am president of the Dupont East Civic Action Association (DECAA), dedicated to community engagement and civic action.

The Mayor's Office of Planning has proposed several rules that erase opportunities for community participation. The successful operation of our democratic form of government requires public participation and agency transparency. To the extent that the new rules eliminate or frustrate public participation, or make the operations of an agency more obscure, we oppose them.

The Office of Planning rules (Subtitle Z § 703.6) would allow the Zoning Commission to make changes to "proffered public benefits and amenities, required covenants, or approve additional relief or flexibility from the zoning regulations" without a hearing. Recent changes in the Comprehensive Plan now allow developers to use map amendments to avoid use of the planned unit development or other relief negotiated with the community. Thus now more than ever, it is important that the map amendments process be open and available for public scrutiny. We oppose these rule changes.

OP proposals would require a reliance on digital communications, both in the application and public comment process and in the process of public notice (such as Subtitle Z § 304.1).

We oppose OP's proposed requirement to rely on digital

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communications as discriminatory and undermining the democratic process. Such changes would discriminate against those without digital equipment or an email address, who are largely seniors and the poor. We are gratified that the OAG is recommending that the Commission not adopt this change and that the Commission continue to accept paper submissions.

OP's proposal draws attention to the phenomenon known as the 'digital divide' which serves to isolate a large population from the civic life of the city. Notice requirements which mandate digital communications will never reach all those who do not have an email address or the digital equipment to receive digital notices.

It is too easy for those of us who use digital means in our daily lives to assume that everyone has access to the equipment. Digital equipment is expensive and requires frequent costly updates. The digital process, for all its benefits, is not intuitive and can be exceedingly frustrating for those accustomed to a lifetime spent mastering other methods. Many seniors have given up on owning or keeping up with changes.

We are in a transitional period to be sure from paper to electronic documentation. We cannot dismiss those who never had or have given up on keeping up on frustrating changes. Compounded by the COVID pandemic, a whole constituency is being left behind. Politicians and elected officials are aware of the digital divide and if they seek votes in an election, they make sure they use the US mail to reach an increasingly isolated demographic. The government records the street addresses of registered voters. It does not necessarily have their email addresses.

The proposed mandate to require digital means of communication and notification has far-reaching consequences for the democratic process and the right of citizens to be informed. We urge you to reject OP's proposal and develop a process of notice instead that includes postcards delivered by US mail to the last known street address.